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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000490

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TAGS: [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: RIOTING IN WESTERN ALGERIA - THE ANGRY YOUNG MEN

REF: A. ALGIERS 197

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 458

Classified By: Ambassador Robert S. Ford, reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (U) Algerian independent newspapers reported on April 28-29 that the city of Chlef, the capital of the province in western Algeria with the same name, suffered from two days of major rioting on April 27-28. According to these press reports, the trial of a community activist who had been fighting with the Chlef provincial governor set off the rioting. Algerian newspapers reported that crowds numbering in the thousands destroyed the Chlef main post office, the local office of the Algerian External Trade Bank, the local museum and the office of Algerie Telecom, as well as burning some automobiles and other privately owned buildings. Press reports varied on the number of arrests, citing numbers ranging from sixty to several hundred. April 29 newspapers reported that the rioting had extended to the smaller towns of Chittia, about twenty kilometers outside Chlef. The April 30 edition of el-Watan, which has done the best reporting, said that rioting continued in Chittia on April 29.

[1](#)2. (C) An experienced journalist with the Quotidien d'Oran newspaper who is from Chlef told the Ambassador April 28 that the rioting resulted from community frustrations with the slowness of housing construction to relocate persons who lost their homes in the 1980 earthquake in Chlef. The community activist taken to court by the governor had been urging the governor to expedite land grants or other approvals to enable new housing construction. The activists was very vocal in his public criticism and the governor responded with a defamation case. The journalist said she had spoken to the governor last year about the drawn-out housing crisis in Chlef, and the governor had told her that he wanted to have a large new development built but that land acquisition was moving only slowly. The governor rejected the idea of simply enabling people to build concrete structures in the shantytowns where they now are living. In addition, the journalist commented, President Bouteflika in 2007 had promised each family that had lost its home in the 1980 earthquake one million Algerian dinars (about USD 150,000) to build permanent structures, plus subsidized bank loans. Late last year, she noted, the government rescinded that financing without explanation, escalating tensions sharply. (The community activist on trial for defamation had been lobbying the GoA to restore the funding for those million dinar grants, according to press reports.)

[1](#)3. (U) The Chlef governor himself told el-Watan newspaper April 28 that the rioting was simply the work of persons

seeking to use the housing problem for their own political ends. He promised that the GoA was working on solving the housing problem and he even pledged to meet the community activist whom he had taken to court to try to find a solution. (He also noted that the community activist's NGO had never received Ministry of Interior approval and thus does not exist.) His interview concluded with a plea that he was not responsible for the problems.

14. (U) Algerian newspaper commentators focused on the Chlef rioting on April 29. One columnist in Quotidien d'Oran noted that such rioting is almost a daily event in one part of Algeria or another. The rioting is a warning indicator that Algerian young people are getting ever angrier and the GoA seems not to know how to address that. A commentator in Liberte newspaper observed that while a GoA-sponsored forum in Algiers talked about "Democracy and Civil Society," in Chlef the government has no dialog with civil society and young people understand that only violence gets the government's attention. A wag in el-Watan observed that Algeria should establish a Minister for Rioting who could be called out to calm rioters down with promises of money and attend international conferences about rioting.

15. (C) Comment: Two weeks ago another city in western Algeria, Gdyl, suffered two days of rioting with several public buildings destroyed. The funerals of several Gdyl young men who drowned in failed attempts to sail to Spain instigated those disturbances, according to press reporting. We do not sense that the Algerian government's stability is at risk, although we watch such isolated acts of rioting carefully to see if they spread. (The 1988 riots that swept in a host of government policy changes started off as an isolated set of demonstrations that quickly spread across the

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country.) Interestingly, some press reports stated that on the second day of the Gdyl rioting some of the rioters parents took to the streets to support their sons verbally. The Chlef and Gdyl riots do remind that there is a very large segment - probably a majority - of Algerians that are dissatisfied with the economic and social conditions in Algeria. The rioting in southern Algeria reported ref a, and the labor strikes reported in ref b are other indicators. Even if that dissatisfaction doesn't yet threaten regime stability it probably does help extremist recruitment. Moreover, it is hard to see how that dissatisfaction will diminish until the government implements policies that boost the private sector and create sustainable growth in sectors like construction.

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